



**AVIATION, TOURISM & CHILDREN'S RIGHTS:
A GLOBAL EMERGENCY**
Statement of the Tourism Advocacy and Action Forum (TAAF)
Prepared by the International Support Centre for Sustainable Tourism

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The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which celebrates International Aviation Day on 7 December calls air transport "by far the safest mode of mass transportation"¹. With climate change careening beyond acceptable limits, and the biosphere endangered by mass tourism, we must broaden our concepts of safety.

If we evaluate safety through an inter-generational lens, the airline business ranks among the most unsafe human enterprises. Promoting air travel elevates not only greenhouse gas emissions, but also consumer lifestyles, consumption patterns and relationships which are unsustainable.

Herein lies a major dilemma for the 21st Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21), and the Rio Conventions generally. Tourism, considered a sustainable industry and major contributor to a 'green economy' by the United Nations, is actually putting humanity on the Red List as endangered.

The precautionary principle must be applied to tourism. At the third United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (or Earth Summit) in 2012, tourism was endorsed without regard for local contexts of concern or the emerging global context of harm². The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is mandated to promote tourism, as a hub for unrestricted economic growth. This engenders mass tourism: in practice, exponential growth.

Globally, our binge spending on tourism is destabilizing the future of children. The mass mobility of consumers drives climate change. In turn, it amplifies biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, water shortages, social inequality, conflict (including domestic violence), forced migration, and often cultural vulnerabilities. Calling this set of behaviours 'tourism' masks its devastating consequences across generations.

Only a few decades ago tourism had a seasonality and geography which offered some room for regulation. Today, the tourism industry pushes all-season expansion, on a planetary scale. Tourism corridors now enwrap the Earth, expediting urbanization. Consumer society views aviation as a commute to global playgrounds and shopping outposts. This has normalized the practice of consumers grazing for excitement and deals worldwide. It raises complex moral questions about the underlying economic model³. Unchecked expansion of tourism has impinged on other peoples', species' and now generations' flourishing and survival.

The aggregate impacts of "2.3 billion passengers a year on more than 26 million flights worldwide"⁴ is difficult to fathom. Tourism, being highly cross-sectoral, has a magnitude of harm beyond other industries. Although the assessment of impacts often is framed narrowly - without adequately bridging all involved economic sectors and affected community realms - recent research shows the correlations between tourism and risky outcomes across various ecological, social and cultural systems globally⁵. The composite of impacts is summarized in scientific literature as a crisis or even precipice for humanity⁶. This news brings increasing anxiety, distress, trauma and other threats to mental and emotional health, especially for children worldwide.

Since the U.N. prioritized sustainable development in 1992, there has been scant attention to reducing tourism. Worldwide, governments, financial institutions, multinational corporations and investors still advance a marketing narrative that tourism is benign, if not beneficial. Airport expansions and aerotropolis construction abound⁷. The aviation sector is pursuing growth, as if that is a lawful option under present biosphere constraints. Business proceeds as if there is no inter-generational context to international law or to fundamental human rights.

Globally, the persons with weakest citizenship are most vulnerable to this economic model. Children shoulder its costs more than any other population. This is evident in the global supply 'chains' of the tourism industry; for example, among oppressed populations and impoverished families of the global South, exploited in manufacturing tourism spaces, infrastructure, souvenirs and experiences. It also manifests in the biosphere crisis now endangering all children worldwide. While the net effect is to diminish children's capabilities, such costs are little documented outside the research enclaves of child labour and child sex trafficking.

The ideology of economic growth now puts an entire generation of children at risk. Aviation, a mainstay of this ideology, is a primary cause of accruing ecological and social imbalances globally. This 'big picture' of aviation - especially its role as a key structural element of neoliberal economics - must be assessed, for us to comprehend the full spectrum of inter-generational costs associated with tourism growth.

Tourism prompts integration into the very economic model which causes widespread harm. Children of affluent societies are groomed to be consumers - the pinnacle being to become a tourist, with precocious stories of travel abroad. Children in impoverished destination areas experience dehumanizing and degrading exchanges through tourism. For both, childhood soon involves more transactions than rites of passage. Meanwhile, adult travellers valuing attachment with their own children often practice detachment as tourists: loading up child porters and waving away child vendors. The Asia-Pacific Child Rights Award for Television and other child-centred research initiatives raise awareness about such dynamics. As tourism displaces communities, disrupts in situ conservation, supercedes customary practice requiring mobility (such as shifting cultivation and pastoralism), and eclipses the mobility needs of refugee children, affected children are deprived of life essentials, safety, and cultural health and must adapt to life on the economic fringes.

We therefore appeal to COP21 to evaluate aviation and tourism in meaningful context, implementing special measures to safeguard today's children and future generations, including:

- prioritizing inter-generational rights and responsibilities, in U.N. decision-making;
- foregrounding an ethic of care, to hasten implementation of the Rio Conventions;
- correcting the misleading narratives of tourism, to protect human rights
- setting limits for the aviation sector, which address its systemic impacts and the urgent need for degrowth of both tourism and other unnecessary travel;
- centring the well-being of children and future generations in evaluation frameworks;
- implementing the full framework of human rights of children, as per international law
- applying the capabilities approach to make children visible in benefit/cost equations and to remedy the inter-generational harms of gross domestic product (GDP) ideology⁸;
- identifying the mobility needs of children which are impeded or superceded by tourism, including their developmental needs and specific cultural rights to mobility.

A child-centred approach to managing climate change must be adhered to in the aviation and tourism industries.

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¹ International Civil Aviation Organization (2010). Message from the President of the Council of ICAO, Mr. Roberto Kobeh González, on the Occasion of International Civil Aviation Day. Montreal, Canada, December 3.

² Johnston, Alison M. (2012). "Tourism: For Next Generations? Rethinking the Future We Want". Third World Resurgence, Third World Network, Malaysia, No. 262, June: 35-38.

³ Brenner, Neil (2013). "Theses on Urbanization," Public Culture, Vol. 25, No. 1: 85-113.

⁴ International Civil Aviation Organization, *ibid*.

⁵ Third World Network (2015). Global Tourism Growth: Remedy or Ruin? Third World Resurgence #301/302, Sept/Oct 2015.

⁶ Rees, William E. (2011). Toward A Sustainable World Economy. Paper delivered at Institute for New Economic Thinking Annual Conference, April 8-11, Bretton Woods, USA.

⁷ Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement (GAAM). <http://antiaero.org/>

⁸ Nussbaum, Martha (2011). Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, USA and London, UK.